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## **Still Wrexham's longest running newspaper – The *Wrexham Advertiser***

In 2012, the *Wrexham Leader* will become Wrexham's longest running newspaper published without a break. However, it will still have a few years yet before it becomes Wrexham's longest-running newspaper, a record currently held by the now defunct *Wrexham Advertiser* (1850-1957).

The *Advertiser* grew from the *Wrexham Registrar and People's Friend* – Wrexham's second newspaper – which was founded in August 1848 by local printers William and George Bayley and published at their General Printing Office in Hope Street. Physically, it resembled a periodical rather than a newspaper, consisting of sixteen double column pages with very few advertisements and was published monthly for one penny. Its content was dominated by essays and articles on local history, together with small amounts of local, domestic, and foreign news.

William and George Bayley were helped by their brother Charles George, a china dealer and newsagent in Oswestry, who, like his brothers had been apprenticed to the printer Richard Hughes, founder of the *Wrexham Recorder*.<sup>1</sup> Provincial newspapers of this time had low initial capital requirements and were often started and run as family businesses. In fact, several Bayley sons and grandsons were to become involved in the press trade.<sup>2</sup>

The *Registrar* ran for a total of seventeen issues, ending in December 1849 when it was succeeded by the *Wrexham Advertiser, and Register of Literary, Railway, Local and General Information* - a four page penny monthly broadsheet - which first appeared in January 1850. The *Advertiser* appeared monthly and was unstamped. From 1712, newspapers had been required to pay a stamp duty which, since 1836,

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Davies, 'Wrexham's first three newspapers; the *Wrexham Recorder*, the *Wrexham Registrar* and the *Wrexham Advertiser* (and descendants) to 1900', *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 47, 1998, 57-70.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Peters, 'A Family in the Trade: The Bayleys of Wrexham and Oswestry', *Quadrat*, 20, 17-20.

had been one penny per issue. By appearing each month, the *Advertiser* hoped to avoid paying stamp duty – which would have doubled its price – by arguing that it was a periodical rather than a newspaper. However, this ploy was unsuccessful as an editorial in its third explained that the Commissioners of the Inland Revenue had decided that the newspaper must be stamped if it wanted to include local and national news.<sup>3</sup> Although the amount of local and national news was reduced in subsequent issues, a considerable amount of such information continued to appear, in seeming defiance to the Commissioners. This defiance continued when the *Advertiser* began twice-monthly publication in December 1850. However, the *Advertiser* survived for only four months as a fortnightly. No issue was published on 15 May and the next issue on the second of June promised an explanation in the July issue as to why it had ceased fortnightly publication but no explanation was forthcoming.<sup>4</sup> Without warning the *Advertiser* ceased publication after thirty-seven issues in September 1852.

There was a lull of two years before the *Advertiser* re-appeared in March 1854, now in the guise of a weekly newspaper. As such it was obliged to be stamped, and was therefore priced at threepence. Weekly publication gave the newspaper a greater opportunity to serve the local community by reporting a wider range of news and political opinion. The four page weekly was published on Saturday mornings with a second edition in the afternoon. In its first issue George Bayley, now sole proprietor, stated that the main reason behind the establishment of the newspaper was the increasing importance of Denbighshire and Flintshire, and that they deserved a local newspaper to record events and to express local opinions.<sup>5</sup>

Within a few years of its establishment, the newspaper had made several noticeable changes. Firstly, its price was reduced to twopence after the abolition of stamp duty in 1855. This led to an increase in circulation in early 1857 and the newspaper purchased a new steam printing machine which allowed it to produce a thousand

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<sup>3</sup> March 1850, p.4

<sup>4</sup> June 1851, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> 11 March 1854, p.1.

copies an hour.<sup>6</sup> By 1858 the weekly *Advertiser* had exceeded the sales of the monthly *Advertiser*, selling 1,700 copies a week.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of mechanisation, in July 1861 it doubled its size to eight pages, enabling it to include more advertisements and also reflecting its increasing circulation, which reached nearly 3,000 a week by 1863.<sup>8</sup>

Although initially declining to support any political party, merely stating that it was an “unflinching advocate of Progress”,<sup>9</sup> by 1857, the *Advertiser* had become a keen supporter of the Liberal party.<sup>10</sup> This was to be something of a double-edged sword as it meant that the newspaper supported the prevailing political opinion in Wrexham, but that it would be difficult to develop a regional circulation throughout North Wales due to the number of Liberal newspapers throughout the region, such as the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*. The *Advertiser* produced two local Liberal Mayor Charles George Bayley (who retained a lifelong interest involvement in his brother’s newspaper) served as Mayor of Oswestry and George Bayley’s successor as editor of the *Advertiser*, George Bradley, served as Mayor of Wrexham in 1880.

The *Advertiser* remained Wrexham’s sole newspaper until 1854. In that year, four issues of the monthly *Wrexham Albion* appeared, and in 1855, the *Albion* was replaced by the *Wrexhamite* (later the *Wrexham Telegraph*). The *Telegraph* brought political diversity to Wrexham’s press market as it was a keen supporter of the Conservative party. Unsurprisingly, the *Advertiser* and the *Telegraph* became bitter rivals, a rivalry which culminated in two libel cases.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 3 January 1857, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Our Birthday’, 6 March 1858, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> 5 December 1863, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> 11 March 1854, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Election Amenities and Conservative Consistency’, 28 March 1857, p.4.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Action for Libel’, 8 August 1857, p.4; ‘Presentation to Mr George Bayley, Proprietor of the *Wrexham and Denbigh Advertiser*’, 9 January 1858, p.9.

Following the death of George Bayley (the newspaper's founder, proprietor, and editor) in January 1863, the newspaper came under the control of his widow Selina, his brother Charles George, and the new editor, George Bradley. As Charles George lived in Oswestry, Bradley was presumably largely responsible for the daily running of the newspaper. Circulation increased after Bayley's death, supposedly because of sympathy for his family.<sup>12</sup> George Bradley, Charles George Bayley, and Selina Bayley proceeded to establish the firm of Bayley & Bradley to carry out the printing of the newspaper. After the death of Bradley, control of the company seems to have moved away from the Bayley family to the children of Bradley,<sup>13</sup> despite William Charles Bayley, son of George, editing the newspaper for over three years, before emigrating to South Africa in 1894.<sup>14</sup>

Several other changes were also made around this time. The newspaper offices moved from Hope Street to Bank Street in 1857, and then to the Music Hall in Henblas Street in 1868.<sup>15</sup> A fourteen year lease was taken on the building and, when it expired, Bradley, Charles George Bayley, and Harry Croom-Johnson (Bradley's son-in-law), took shares in the property.<sup>16</sup> By 1870 the newspaper was claiming that it was read throughout Denbighshire and Flintshire, and also in parts of Merionethshire, Shropshire, and Cheshire.<sup>17</sup> The *Advertiser* also took the opportunity to decide on a final title, having changed its sub-title every few years to reflect its circulation area and became the *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*.

The *Telegraph* had ceased in 1867 and the *Advertiser* was Wrexham's only newspaper until a new Conservative rival appeared in 1869. The *Wrexham* (later *North Wales*) *Guardian* was established by several prominent local Conservatives in

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<sup>12</sup> 'To Our Readers', 16 May 1863, p.8.

<sup>13</sup> 'Notes on the History of the *Wrexham Advertiser*' compiled by Elizabeth Rodern Croom-Johnson, c.1938. Wrexham Archives and Local Studies, DWL/12/5

<sup>14</sup> 8 February 1891, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> 3 October 1868, p.4.

<sup>16</sup> 'Notes on the History of the *Wrexham Advertiser*' compiled by Elizabeth Rodern Croom-Johnson, c.1938. Wrexham Archives and Local Studies, DWL/12/5

<sup>17</sup> 2 July 1870, p.4.

response to the Liberal victory in the 1868 general election.<sup>18</sup> As a supporter of the rival party, the *Advertiser* came in for many attacks from the *Guardian* and therefore must have been gleeful in 1878 when it was able to reveal the names of the financial supporters of the North Wales Constitutional Press Company, the body which owned the *Guardian*.<sup>19</sup> The *Advertiser* published a printed circular dated 24 January 1878 which it had received from Watkin Williams (the Liberal MP for the Denbigh Boroughs), written by local Conservatives Sir Watkin Williams Wynn and the Hon. George Kenyon, appealing for money for the *Guardian* and listing the names of those who had financially supported the newspaper over the past eight years.<sup>20</sup> The *Advertiser* must have been pleased to publicise Williams' view that the *Guardian* had failed to secure sufficient support and that it was dishonest for a newspaper to exist by private financial support rather than commercial success.<sup>21</sup>

In April 1895 the *Advertiser* reduced its price to a penny in the hope of increasing its sales<sup>22</sup> and in 1899 the *Advertiser* became connected to the national telephone exchange at Wrexham thus allowing reporters and advertisers to contact the newspaper more quickly.<sup>23</sup> The newspaper was enlarged in February 1904 to give it more space for advertisements and news reports<sup>24</sup> and this led to the introduction of a new column in September, the 'London Letter' being especially written for the newspaper and focusing on the action of Welsh MPs and important Welsh issues.<sup>25</sup>

In 1907 a new editor, James Wright, (who replaced John Rice Jones who had worked on the newspaper for fifteen years) brought several changes to the newspaper. One of the first changes he made was to alter the day of publication of

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<sup>18</sup> Printed circulation from G T Kenyon and Sir Watkin William-Wynn, Flintshire Record Office, D/KT/22

<sup>19</sup> Lisa Peters, 'The Troubled History of a Welsh Newspaper Publishing Company: The North Wales Constitutional Company Limited 1869-1878' in P Issac & B McKay (Eds.), *The Moving Market: Continuity and Change in the Book Trade* (Delaware: British Library, 2001), pp. 117-125.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Hon George Kenyon and the Press', 23 May 1878, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> 'Mr Watkin Williams and the Tory Press of Denbighshire', 4 May 1878, p.3.

<sup>22</sup> 'Ourselves'. 16 March 1895, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> 25 March 1899, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> 'About Ourselves', 23 January 1904, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> 'Our London Letter', 24 September 1904, p.4.

the first edition from Friday to Thursday, the second edition remaining on Saturday.<sup>26</sup> This change lasted less than a year as, despite a rise in circulation, the newspaper had received requests from both subscribers and advertisers to revert to the original day of publication.<sup>27</sup> From 1909 the *Advertiser* produced a Mold edition<sup>28</sup> and in March 1914 the newspaper expanded to twelve pages with the price remaining at one penny.<sup>29</sup> The *Advertiser* remained at this size until September 1914 when it was reduced to its previous size of eight pages, probably because of incipient wartime paper shortages.

World War I brought not only paper shortage to the *Advertiser*. Like other provincial newspapers, the *Advertiser's* coverage focused on the personal experiences of local soldiers and their families. From January 1915 the newspaper had a regular half page column on "The War" which focused on letters from soldiers at the front, the gallantry of local soldiers, recruiting drives, and news from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. These news items had an upbeat tone such as King George V's letter to the local parents who had six sons in the army<sup>30</sup> and reports of how Welsh soldiers celebrated St David's day at the front.<sup>31</sup> Even those articles which reported the deaths of local soldiers dwelt on their heroics such as that of the former *Advertiser* employee who died with "Wales for ever" on his lips.<sup>32</sup> Later, photographs of soldiers who had died or been awarded medals began to appear.

By 1916 the impact of paper scarcity was being felt. In February the *Advertiser* asked its agents only to order the numbers of copies that were regularly purchased and readers were asked to place a regular order with an agent,<sup>33</sup> and a month later the newspaper told its readers that it could only guarantee a copy to those who had

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<sup>26</sup> 'Important Notice', 9 November 1904, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> 'Important Notice to Readers and Advertisers', 31 October 1908, p.5.

<sup>28</sup> 'Our New Departure', 2 January 1909, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> 12 March 1914, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> 'Six Sons will be with the Colours', 17 April 1915, p.3.

<sup>31</sup> 'St David's Day in the Trenches', 13 March 1915, p.3.

<sup>32</sup> 'Cpl Owen Lewis Williams Killed – A Wrexham Hero – Former *Advertiser* Employee', 15 May 1915, p.5.

<sup>33</sup> 'Important – Paper Scarcity', 12 February 1916, p.5.

placed an order with a newsagent.<sup>34</sup> The *Advertiser* was clearly concerned about wasting paper and was determined to reduce paper wastage and costs as much as possible. A year later, the newspaper announced that chance sales would cease in another effort to save paper, labour, and fuel.<sup>35</sup> The war had also delayed for six years, the appearance of the newspaper which would eventually cause the *Advertiser's* demise – the *Wrexham Leader*.

In May 1919 the *Advertiser* returned to eight pages and immediately introduced new columns such as "Fun, facts and fancies", "Wisdom of the wise". "Children's corner", "My friend in town", "London's latest gossip", "General news", and "Items of Welsh news" - all non-local items that could be prepared in advance.<sup>36</sup> In 1920 the *Advertiser* restated its principles as "the people's paper, the leading organ of Liberal principles; and in full sympathy with the aims and aspirations of labour; and the objects and schemes considered for the welfare of the town and district generally." The newspaper admitted that its reduction to four pages during World War I had given its proprietors "much anxiety" as it claimed it could have attained a large circulation but for its reluctance to print the extra copies for casual sale at a time of paper shortage.<sup>37</sup> By December it claimed increasing sales, no price increase despite rises in the cost of paper and taxes, increasing advertising and the largest net sale of any newspaper printed and published in Denbighshire.<sup>38</sup> After the war saw the rise of what was to become a staple of the local newspaper - the wedding photograph.

Like much of the country, the *Advertiser* seemed to lose interest in promoting Liberalism after the end of World War I. In April 1923 it reasserted its commitment to Liberalism and although sympathetic to the Labour party, it preferred to remain loyal to Liberalism.<sup>39</sup> However, this loyalty was certainly not as loudly proclaimed as

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<sup>34</sup> 'Order your *Wrexham Advertiser*', 25 March, p.5.

<sup>35</sup> 'Waste Paper', 7 April 1917, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> 'The *Wrexham Advertiser* Enlarged', 24 May 1919, p.7.

<sup>37</sup> 'Ourselves', 3 January 1920, p.5.

<sup>38</sup> 'Of Ourselves', 28 December 1920, p.5.

<sup>39</sup> 'Liberalism', 14 April 1923, p.5.



previously and the newspapers; interest in politics and the fortunes of the Liberal party slowly petered out. The firm Liberal grip on Wales was loosening and with it the *Advertiser's* links to the party.

In November 1924 the *Advertiser* devoted two pages to the unveiling of a memorial to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in Wrexham<sup>40</sup> which led to "enormous" sales with extra copies being produced to satisfy demand.<sup>41</sup> A few weeks later the *Advertiser* increased to twelve pages, which it claimed was a temporary measure unless advertiser wished otherwise.<sup>42</sup> Advertiser demand failed to materialise because by March it was back to eight pages.

Football, cricket, cycling, and other sports had long been covered in the *Advertiser* but from the mid-1920s football began to take increasing prominence. This led to the appearance of such unfamiliar and familiar headlines as "Wales humiliate England - Outstanding victory at Burnley"<sup>43</sup> and "Wrexham's declining position".<sup>44</sup>

The *Advertiser* was still able to get itself involved in a dispute with authority as demonstrated in 1927 when it became embroiled in a dispute with the Wrexham Rural District Council. The newspaper claimed that it was acting in the public interest by critiquing the council and the council responded by threatening to remove its advertising to another newspaper and suspending the *Advertiser* reporter from its meetings.<sup>45</sup>

1927 also saw the resignation of James Wright who had been the editor for twenty years, due to bereavement, and the appointment of chief reporter, Mr J G Benson as

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<sup>40</sup> 'Sir Goscombe John's Beautiful Memorial to the Royal Welch Fusiliers unveiled by Sir Francis Lloyd at Wrexham', 22 November 1924, pp.4-5.

<sup>41</sup> 29 November 1924, p.5.

<sup>42</sup> 'Ourselves and Christmas 1924', 6 December 1924, p.5.

<sup>43</sup> 3 December 1927, p.2.

<sup>44</sup> 4 January 1929, p.2.

<sup>45</sup> 'Wrexham Rural District Council and the *Advertiser*', 23 April 1927, p.5.

editor.<sup>46</sup> In February 1929 the *Advertiser* launched its "junior academy of art" where readers under fourteen were invited to send in drawings of a given subject to win prizes.<sup>47</sup> August 1927 saw an increase to twelve pages<sup>48</sup> and December 1930 to sixteen pages due to increasing advertising demands.<sup>49</sup> This led to an increasing number of photos of weddings, sports teams, local appointment, carnival queens, and fetes. Its increase in size led to a need for more advertising and the *Advertiser* spent the early months of 1932 urging business to continue advertising in the harsh economic times.<sup>50</sup>

In May 1932 the *Advertiser* purchased a new rotary press started by the Mayor of Wrexham and received a telegramme of congratulations from David Lloyd George.<sup>51</sup> However this development masked difficulties in the newspaper's finances. Just before the new rotary press started the *Advertiser's* shareholder met to consider selling their shares as the newspaper had been losing sales to the *Wrexham Leader*. In November, negotiations were opened with Rowland Thomas, the managing director of Woodall, Minshall & Thomas (proprietors of the *Leader* and the *Oswestry Advertiser*) for the purchase of sales in the *Advertiser* by the *Leader*. Less than a year later, Bayley & Bradley was sold to Rowland Thomas and the directors of the *Leader*. The last issue under Bayley & Bradley control appeared on 24 June 1933 by which time the newspaper had reduced in size to ten pages.<sup>52</sup>

The newly owned *Advertiser* moved its publication day to a Wednesday to avoid competition with the *Leader*. The *Advertiser* was now printed in Oswestry at the *Oswestry Advertiser's* Caxton Press office. In April 1934 the day of publication was moved to a Thursday and for the first time since the days of the *Registrar* news items

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<sup>46</sup> 'A Business Change', 16 July 1927, p.5.

<sup>47</sup> 'Our Junior Academy of Art', 16 February 1929, p.5.

<sup>48</sup> 'Next Week's *Advertiser*', 27 August 1927, p.5.

<sup>49</sup> 'Our First Sixteen Pages', 13 December 1930, p.9.

<sup>50</sup> Editorial, 2 January 1932, p.7; 'Advertising as Insurance', 19 March 1932, p.7.

<sup>51</sup> '1848-1932 – Wrexham's Oldest Newspaper – Looking Back and Looking Forward – Mayor of Wrexham sets a Mighty Machine in Motion – Rotary Press to Speed Wrexham to Enterprise and Success', 23 May 1932, p.8; 'Congratulations to the *Wrexham Advertiser*', 23 May 1932, p.9.

<sup>52</sup> 'Notes on the History of the *Wrexham Advertiser*' compiled by Elizabeth Rodern Croom-Johnson, c.1938. Wrexham Archives and Local Studies, DWL/12/5

appearance on the front page together with a "new and entirely modernised design."<sup>53</sup> A week later the *Advertiser* reported that the "sweeping changes" of last week had met with "some little misgivings" but has been generally well received.<sup>54</sup> The misgivings may have been from the advertisers whose wares had been evicted from the front page with the first main headline being the re-opening of Brymbo Steelworks. In January 1935 the day of publication moved back to Wednesday due to repeated requests from readers and agents.<sup>55</sup> 1935 also saw the end of the editorial and the amount of advertising fell noticeably. These were indications that the older newspaper was seen as inferior to the new upstart. There was very little interest in politics - no longer was the Liberal party promoted. The *Advertiser* vacillated between eight and ten pages which suggested inconsistency in the amount of advertising it was able to attract.

In early 1936 Bayley & Bradley bought a recently established newspaper - the *Wrexham Star* - published by Fletcher and Westall - and merged the two newspapers to create the *Wrexham Advertiser and Star* which came out on Fridays.<sup>56</sup> Once suspects that the Bayley and Bradley families would have been horrified at this new arrival with its headlines like "Pedestrians beware — Trouble ahead of jaywalkers"<sup>57</sup> and "Rats" - Ruabon has a plague."<sup>58</sup> The new newspaper contained a mix of local and national advertising. The *Advertiser and Star* adopted a tabloid type approach to news and its mix of local and national advertising suggests that it was aiming for a different reader than that of the *Leader*.

During World War II the *Advertiser and Star* was reduced to ten pages. Like the previous war, the newspaper focused on the actions of local men at war and their experiences. There was significantly less business advertising - mainly national companies such as Ovaltine and Persil and the government, who may have been

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<sup>53</sup> 'The New *Advertiser*', 26 April 1934, p.6.

<sup>54</sup> 'Ourselves', 3 May 1934, p.6.

<sup>55</sup> 'Important Announcement', 24 January 1935, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> 'Wrexham Newspapers Combine – *Advertiser and Star*', 25 March 1936, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> 17 April 1936, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> 8 May 1936, p.3.

paying below market rates. Having seen out the war, the *Advertiser and Star* ceased publication in 28 December 1945 "owing to continued newspaper difficulties" and was incorporated into the *Leader*.<sup>59</sup> This cessation was only meant to be temporary but lasted eight years.

The *Advertiser and Star* recommenced on 21 April 1953. Its cessation was blamed upon a lack of paper which, now resolved, meant the re-appearance of the newspaper.<sup>60</sup> The *Advertiser and Star* would offer a mixture of news, pictures, and special features that would interest the entire family. It had seemingly abandoned its long-held commitment to Liberalism and its first front page contained a glowing welcome from Robert Richards, Wrexham's Labour MP.<sup>61</sup> The newspaper came out on Tuesday and was priced at three pence for sixteen pages. The *Advertiser and Star* tried to distinguish itself from the *Leader* with a children's column, gardening and book section, film reviews, a women's columns, items of local history, and news on local industries - magazine-type content that would be prepared well in advance of publication. Although its name was the *Advertiser and Star*, the newspaper referred to itself as the *Star*. A further nod to its increasing tabloid appearance was the large photograph of a pretty young lady on the cover who was being lauded for her sporting or academic achievements.

The last issue of the *Advertiser and Star* appeared on 31 December 1957. There was no mention that its issue was to be the last. Its end after 107 years was announced in the newspaper that probably heralded its demise. In March 1958 the *Leader* announced that it would appear twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays, taking the *Advertiser and Star*'s midweek slot.<sup>62</sup> The length of time between the end of the *Advertiser and Star* and the official announcement of its decline suggests that the decision to cease production was sudden and possibly that attempts were being made to keep it going throughout January and February.

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<sup>59</sup> 'IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT', 28 December 1945, p.1.

<sup>60</sup> 'Debut', 21 April 1953, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> 'Rejoice', 21 April 1953, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> 'Leader to Appear Twice a Week,' *Wrexham Leader*, 14 March 1958, p.1.

The *Advertiser*, in its varying guises and with different names, ran for over a century from 1850 to 1957. However with breaks in publication from 1852 to 1854 and 1946-1953, totalling some nine years, it falls just short of a century of publication. Nevertheless, the importance of the *Advertiser* in the history of North Wales newspapers' has yet to be fully recognised. It began in the era of the stamped press and survived beyond the Second World War, and were it not for the *Leader* it would probably still be in existence today.

### **Further Reading**

Lisa Peters, *Politics, Publishing and Personalities: Wrexham Newspapers, 1848-1914* (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2011).

Lisa Peters, *Wrexham Newspapers, 1848-1914*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, 2002).

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